Make it: a shelf that is level

Ages 6 to 8, with a grown-up.

A small shelf on a practice board, hung the way June hung hers. The practice board stands in for a wall, so nothing is attached to a real wall. You do the measuring, marking and checking, and the screwdriver turns with a grown-up's hand over yours.

The grown-up's job

- Starts every screw hole with an awl or hand drill. A child uses neither.
- Steadies the practice board so it cannot tip.
- Stays for the whole project.

Tools and parts



Practice board



Shelf board



Two small shelf brackets with short screws



Tape measure or ruler



Pencil



Small level



Screwdriver that fits



Safety glasses



One marble



Small squares of paper for shims

Steps

1. Glasses on. Clear the bench. Radio low.



2. Stand the practice board upright, bottom edge on the bench, held steady by a grown-up. Measure up from the bottom edge at the left end. Make a pencil mark.



3. Measure up from the bottom edge at the right end. Make a mark. Do not say "about there."



4. Measure both ends again. Do the marks match? Hold the level against the board across them. Bubble in the middle? Draw the line. If not, rub out the higher mark, make a new one lower until it is, then draw the line along the level.



5. The grown-up starts a screw hole at each bracket spot, top edge of the bracket on your line, board steady, every hand clear of the point.



6. Turn the screws, grown-up's hand over yours. Stop when each bracket is snug.



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a shelf that is level

7 Set the shelf on the brackets. Level on the shelf. Bubble in the middle?



8 Marble test on the smooth shelf, a grown-up watching. If it sits, you did it. If it rolls, measure both ends again. A shim (a folded paper) can work in a pinch.



Safety for grown-ups

- Stay for the whole project. Nothing is for working alone.
- Eye protection for everyone in the room while tools are out.
- The grown-up starts the screw holes. A child uses neither awl nor drill. No power tools in this project.
- Screwdriver: grown-up's hand over the child's; free hand flat on the board, well away from the screw and never in front of the tip; use a screwdriver that fits the head.
- Small parts and choking: screws, brackets, paper bits and marbles are choking hazards. Keep them away from mouths and from children under 4. The marble is the item most likely to be forgotten on the floor.
- Clear bench. Walk, do not run. Sweep up after. Use plastic jars only on a practice shelf.
- Tape measure blades can cut; let them retract slowly.
- Practice board only. Hanging a real shelf is a grown-up job: find the wall studs and check for wires and pipes first.
- Follow the instructions that came with your tools and parts. Wash hands after.

A fact to check

A spirit level has a curved vial with a bubble. Two marks show where the bubble sits when the surface is level; at slight slopes the bubble moves away from the marked center. (Source: Wikipedia, Spirit level.)

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